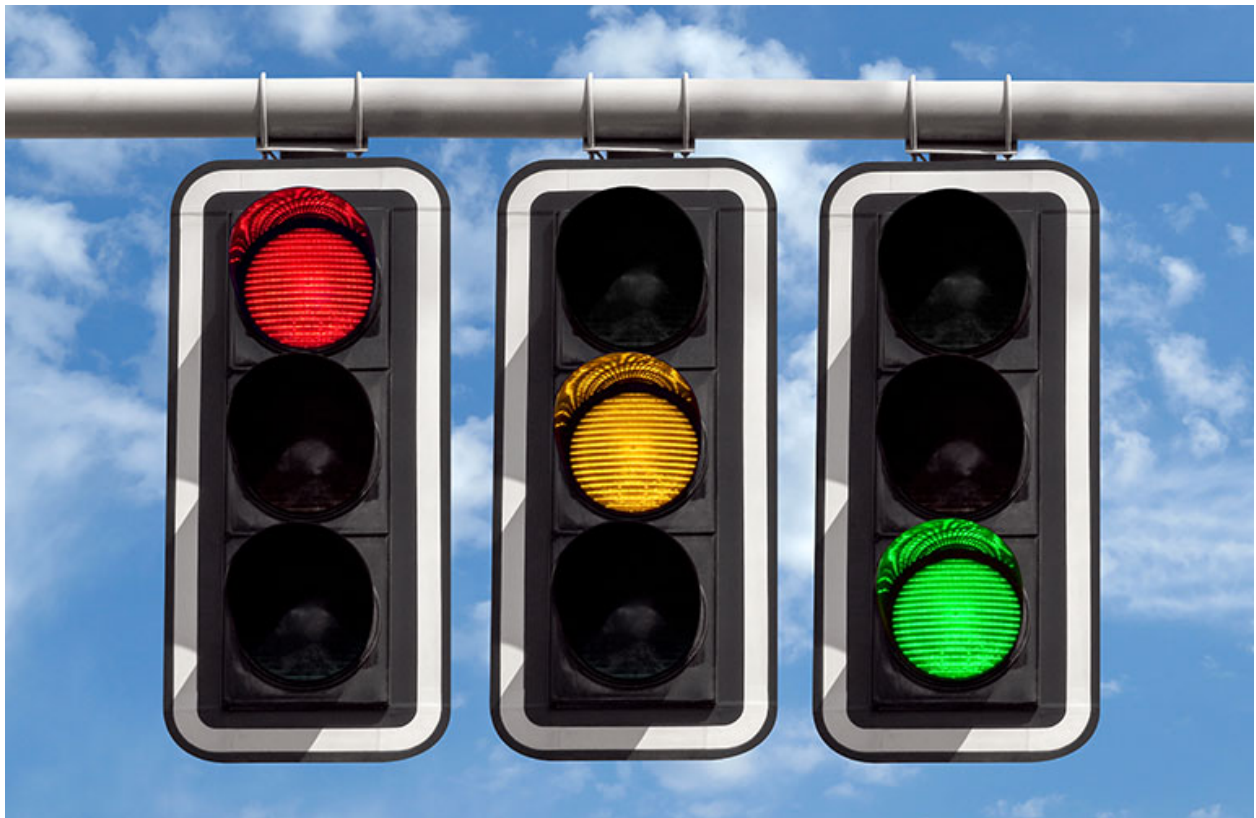


# *Restore SMTD*

Resuming Service Post-COVID-19 Emergency

6/1/2020

Sangamon Mass Transit District (SMTD)



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## Introduction

### Emerging from COVID-19-related Service Reductions

Finishing SMTD's third month of COVID-19 response, the discussion throughout Illinois and the United States has shifted from stay-at-home orders and added restrictions to the re-opening of cities, counties, states, and the nation. The discussion at SMTD is similar: What will service look like as we move toward a return to a full service schedule, and what do we need to do to plan for that change?

The following pages explain the state of SMTD before the pandemic as a simple baseline, SMTD's current state and activities, and a multi-faceted plan to return to full service in the coming weeks. This plan is based on a number of factors from ridership to local-, county-, and state-imposed restrictions on businesses and travel.

### SMTD Before COVID-19

Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Illinois, SMTD was experiencing our best growth in several years. From early 2019 to early 2020, SMTD was experiencing as high as 12% growth in ridership. January ridership went from 119,315 in 2019 to 133,925 in 2020, an increase of 12%. February ridership was up from 116,002 in 2019 to 123,766 in 2020, an increase of over 6.5%. Overall, ridership to date this fiscal year was 1,038,170 versus 1,009,290 at the same time one year ago - an increase of just under 3%.

SMTD was in the development stages of a Request for Proposals (RFP) to update our cash-only fare collection system and had discussed expansion of services to better serve all corners of the Springfield area.

The SMTD bus fleet reached the much-desired "State of Good Repair" status in early 2020, meaning all buses in the fleet are running within their industry-standard life-span, and the agency was discussing the addition of rolling stock to provide a contingency fleet as well as vehicles for route/service expansion.

Approximately one-and-a-half years ago, SMTD began urbanized area service, providing fixed route morning and afternoon service to the communities of Chatham, Riverton, Rochester, and Sherman.

SMTD's seventeen regular fixed routes, four night service routes, and four urbanized area routes made up regular service, and an additional twelve supplemental routes primarily to Springfield high schools and a nighttime express route between the University of Illinois Springfield and the Chatham Hills Apartments area provided more-targeted service to area students.

## SMTD COVID-19 Response

### Timeline

- 4/15 Face-covering required for operators/passengers
- 3/30 Rear Door Passenger Boarding Except Disabled
- 3/30 Schedules Reduced to Saturday Hours
- 3/30 TWICE Daily Disinfecting Buses as staffing allows
- 3/30 April 27 Board Meeting To Be Held via Teleconference
- 3/30 6-ft. Rule Implemented in Break Areas
- 3/23 RS Called if Sick Passenger
- 3/23 Disabled seating on buses closed to all but Disabled passengers
- 3/23 March Board Meeting Canceled
- 3/23 Night Service Ending at 9pm
- 3/23 UA Routes Suspended
- 3/21 Essential Travel Only
- 3/21 No alcohol allowed on buses
- 3/19 Offices Closed to Public
- 3/17 No Fare Collection to Reduce Operator Interaction
- 3/14 Google GTFS Updates of Changes
- 3/12 School Trippers Suspended
- 3/12 114E Suspended
- 3/9 Daily Disinfecting of Break Rooms
- 3/9 Operators Supplied w/gloves, wipes, disinfectant
- 3/9 Daily Monitoring of IL IDPH Announcements
- 3/9 Weekly Employee Update Memo
- Ongoing County Response Updates forward to Unions
- Ongoing Frequent Topic-Related Postings
- Ongoing Frequent Website Updates
- Ongoing Frequent Social Media Updates
- Ongoing Regular Monitoring of APTA/Other Transit Agencies

## **Service Reductions**

- SMTD weekday routes have been reduced to previous Saturday service, which is approximately 60% of regular/previous weekday service.
- SMTD has removed the last two trips from the weekday Night Service schedule.
- Saturday service has been reduced to hourly service.
- Urbanized Area Routes have been suspended.
- No fare is being collected for fixed route or paratransit services.
- Road Supervisors monitor passengers clearly not traveling for essential services.
- Passengers have been instructed to board through the rear doors of buses.
- Paratransit has limited ridership to one passenger per vehicle at one time.

## **Employee Communication and Health Care**

Early on during this pandemic, administration and human resources worked to communicate with employees regularly and to inform employees of health care options as they applied to seeking medical care.

- SMTD has regularly posted guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Department of Labor and relevant local, state, and federal guidance or updates.
- As testing became available, employees potentially exposed to family, friends, or acquaintances testing positive for COVID-19 were instructed to be tested at the Sangamon County Department of Public Health testing facility.
- Employees experiencing symptoms have been instructed to stay home and contact their medical provider.
- Employees were also made aware of testing made available to the community by private providers, such as Walgreen's.

SMTD has been fortunate to not experience any sort of outbreak among employees. However, the emergency schedules put in place March 30<sup>th</sup>, were designed to absorb a higher-than-normal number of operators calling in sick without disrupting service.

## **Disinfecting**

SMTD routinely fogged buses with a disinfectant left on the buses overnight on weekends to disinfect and clear before operators boarded the buses for regular operation in the morning on Mondays. That schedule consisted of once-a-month disinfecting and regular deep cleaning to follow.

As COVID-19 began to appear in the U.S. and Illinois, SMTD quickly increased cleaning as follows:

- Daily disinfecting of every bus with a bleach-based spray on weekdays
- Disinfecting fogging on weekends, along with additional deep-cleaning

As the number of cases rose in Illinois and began to appear in Sangamon County, bus cleaning was increased to:

- Twice daily disinfecting spray, with operators on “report” runs available to shuttle buses back and forth from the Transfer Center or to serve as cleaning crews (This is the current cleaning schedule at the time of the formulation of this plan.)
- In addition to regular cleaning staff for facilities, additional operations staff have assumed cleaning duties around SMTD offices, allowing for multiple disinfecting times throughout the day when door handles, hard surfaces, and other frequently-touched services are wiped down.
- All employees have been issued appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Additional supplies of PPE have been ordered – some received – to avoid shortages which were experienced early on in this pandemic.

## **Social Distancing in SMTD Facilities**

SMTD adapted swiftly and efficiently to setting up multiple spaces where employees on break could sit without violating the six-foot social distancing rule recommended by the CDC.

- In addition to regular break rooms, the board room and new training room spaces were opened for operators to be able to sit with plenty of space between each other.
- The maintenance break room, which opens to the training space, has been open to allow maintenance department staff to sit with plenty of space between each other when on break or at lunch.
- Use of the conference room has been replaced with conference calls and Zoom-type meetings.

- Some admin employees who can do their job at home have had regular work-from-home hours for several weeks to limit the number of employees in administration at any one time and to make the environment one in which it is easier to follow social distancing recommendations.
- On March 19<sup>th</sup>, SMTD offices were closed to the public. The lobby has remained closed, and the only activity at the dispatch window lobby besides operations have been an occasional special case concerning the return of a personal item left on a bus or something similar – all handled on a case-by-case basis. Pass renewals and sales continue to be closed.
- With SMTD offices closed to the public, April and May Board of Trustees meetings were held remotely via Zoom. The first meeting was recorded with the recording being posted to the website and social media immediately following the meeting. The second meeting was streamed LIVE on Facebook, and also posted on the website immediately following the meeting.
- Passengers at SMTD facilities – downtown Transfer Center and Junction Circle transfer point – are required to wear a face-covering while on the premises.

## Returning to Full Service

### Triggers and Benchmarks

Three factors will guide the timing of the switch to full service schedules from the current emergency schedules being run today. Those factors are overall ridership trends, local and state government restrictions/re-opening, and local COVID-19 activity.

To foster safe operations at SMTD without compromising the safety of our passengers and the community in general, four additional topics will be considered: 1. Cleaning; 2. Health Checks & Wellness; 3. Operator Safety; 4. Passenger Safety.

	Ridership Trends	Gov't Restrictions/Re-Opening	Local COVID-19 Activity
Pre-Pandemic	4,000 – 5,000 per day	No Restrictions	N/A
Stay-At-Home Order (Governor's Phase I/II)	1,800 – 2,000 per day (down 60%+)	State-At-Home Order – Essential Travel Only	Self-quarantine if symptomatic
SMTD – Non-essential travel allowed again	2,000 – 3,000 per day	Governor's Phase III	Testing for Essential Employees Available
SMTD Phase 1 – Return to 95%	3,000 per day	Governor's Phase III/IV	Testing for Essential Employees Available
SMTD Phase 2 – Return to pre-pandemic service+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4,000 – 5,000 per day</li> <li>Some demand for Urbanized Area</li> </ul>	Governor's Phase III/IV	Sangamon County Positive Test Rate Remains < 20%

### Ridership Trends

In pre-pandemic days, a regular weekday would see ridership of between four thousand and five thousand passengers per day. Saturdays would typically see half those numbers. 2020 ridership was trending 10% to 12% higher than 2019 ridership.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Illinois, and officials responded with stay-at-home orders, SMTD experienced a drop in ridership of over 60%. Both fixed route service and paratransit service have seen similar impact.

As SMTD considers returning to full service or something close, passenger counts and trends will be the largest factor considered. While we plan to continue high levels of cleaning and safety practices of both operators and passengers alike, because we provide a service with limits on how tightly we can control social spacing in such a small space, we must be ridership-driven.



If the stay-at-home order is still in place, but a thousand more passengers are riding the bus to doctor appointments, banks, grocery stores or jobs, SMTD must respond to the number of people riding - above all else. How SMTD will address operator and passenger safety will be addressed later in this plan. As the Governor's plan allows for more non-essential travel, SMTD will respond likewise.

Phase I of Restoring Service would be SMTD's regular weekday schedule, excluding Urbanized Area Service to Chatham, Riverton, Rochester, and Sherman and supplemental service to schools, since this will likely happen sometime in the first half of Summer 2020. Service would be suspended to any sites tied to COVID-19 outbreaks for a medically-appropriate period of time, and efforts will be made to utilize our fleet to the extent possible to add vehicles to any routes packed with passengers.

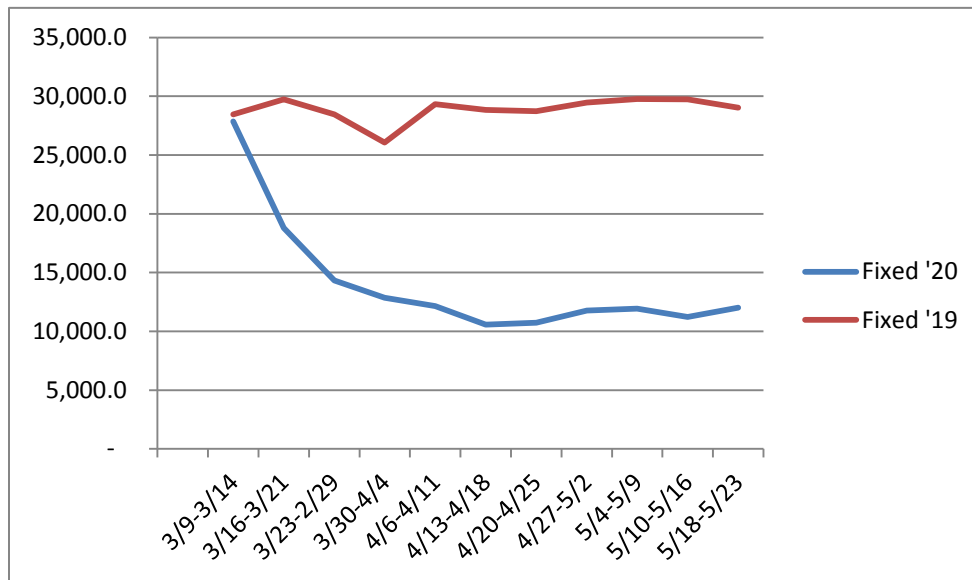
Phase I would be triggered by a ridership increase of approximately 1,000 more passengers per day than we are experiencing now, which would be an approximate 50% increase over today, but still well-below our typical 4,000 to 5,000 passengers per day. The intent would be to increase service as ridership appears to trend up in order to provide more options for passengers and to avoid crowds as best we can.

Phase II of Restoring Service would be SMTD's full weekday schedule as deemed appropriate at that time, including Urbanized Area Service, any necessary supplemental service to schools, etc. Phase II would likely be the end of rear boarding and free rides, although other factors, such as the installation of plexiglass barriers for operators could trigger the return of fares and front door boarding.

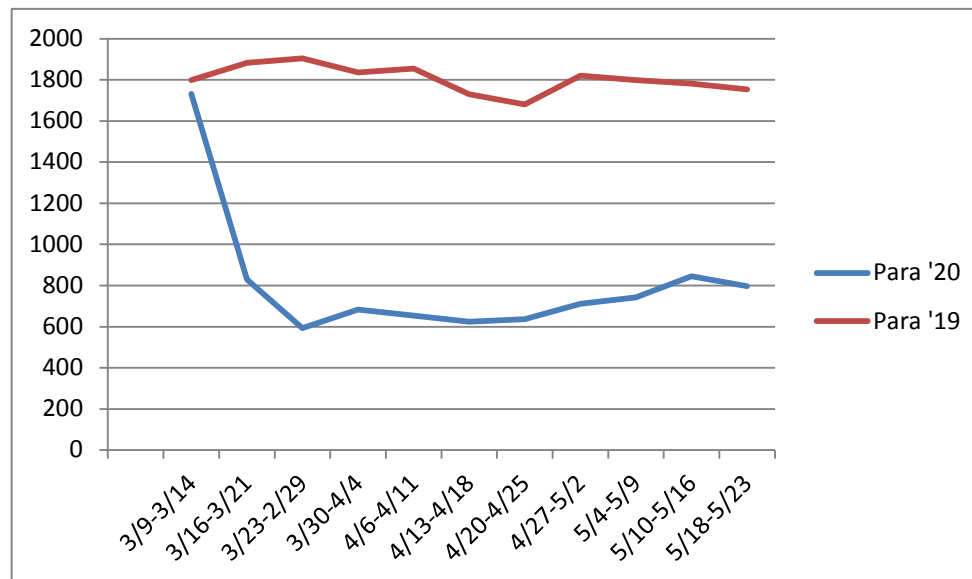
In Phase II, face coverings MAY STILL BE REQUIRED, depending on government guidelines and COVID-19 activity still in the area, and SMTD may require face coverings after the point the government no longer requires them. Buses are a unique, enclosed environment, and SMTD takes the role as a public transportation provider with the utmost seriousness when it comes to providing a space unlikely to be able to provide for social distancing in every situation.

Phase II would be triggered by a ridership increase to levels approaching pre-pandemic ridership - 4,000 to 5,000 passengers per weekday.

*The two following graphs illustrate SMTD's ridership from the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis through the third full week of May 2020:*



2020 COVID-19-Affected Fixed Route Ridership by Week



2020 COVID-19-Affected Paratransit Ridership by Week

### Government Restrictions/Re-Opening Phases

The science used across the United States to develop re-opening plans often considers public transportation. That said, SMTD will react to ridership independently from government plans in order to protect our operators and passengers. With daily observation of ridership, SMTD is able to quickly respond to major changes in trends. We can, however, anticipate how our restoring service will likely align with the Restore Illinois Plan.

Phase I of Restoring Service could begin at any time but will likely come sometime during the Governor's Restore Illinois Phase III, which begins May 29<sup>th</sup> and is expected to last at least twenty-eight days.

Phase II of Restoring Service would be the final re-introduction of Urbanized Area Service and any school-related service as schools re-open. This phase could begin during the Governor's Restore Illinois Phase III, but will likely happen with Restore Illinois Phase IV or Phase V.

### **Local COVID-19 Activity**

The Springfield area has been fortunate to have low positive rates since testing began. The area's positive rate is well below the Governor's plan requirements. That "less than twenty percent" mark is included as a benchmark we would watch in the case of any spike in local positive tests.

Additionally, any known hotspots, such as senior facilities, will be avoided by both mainline and paratransit service until such time as local authorities deem such a facility safe. Emergency services are better-equipped to handle operating in such an environment and should be called if a patient in a "hot-spot" under quarantine needs transport to additional medical services.

Should local COVID-19 activity increase to show a sudden or large spike in positive cases, an outbreak at one or more facilities, or other serious "back-sliding" in the area, SMTD would consider moving back to the current emergency schedule until such time as SMTD and local authorities deem conditions safe to return to full service.

### **Cleaning**

One long-term improvement coming from the COVID-19 pandemic will be the high-frequency cleaning schedule for SMTD vehicles now being implemented. Cleaning has virtually quadrupled during this time, and the hard work of staff has produced processes and materials that will make adding these twice-daily cleaning schedules of our buses to our everyday service a benefit to employees and passengers alike.

During the Return to Service Phase I, much of the staff now re-deployed to cleaning buses and/or facilities will return to operating buses. SMTD is considering the most responsible and cost-effective means with which to maintain this high level of cleaning. We will consider:

- Adding additional cleaning staff
- Deploying new cleaning technologies
- Using new cleaning products and methods

SMTD will consider any associated costs to the budget as the necessary cost of doing business post-COVID-19.

Re-opening SMTD's lobby to the public for regular renewals or purchases of passes, meeting check-in, and other public-facing activities will follow multiple alterations to procedures. Efforts are being made to:

- Reduce the number of items available that need cleaning, including removing excess chairs, fliers, pens, etc.
- Spacing stickers will be added to the floors,
- No more than two persons per household, or one person and one aide (as needed), will be allowed in the lobby at one time,
- Only three marked appropriate spots to wait inside including the counter,
- No one standing in the glass-enclosed space,
- Staff will be encouraged to use other paths through administration to lessen the frequency of staff passing through public space.
- Masks will be required for as long as passengers and operators are required to wear them.
- Built-in hand sanitizer dispensers available for public use
- Staff will be equipped with disinfecting wipes to disinfect surfaces as needed.
- Staff working the front desk will wear rubber gloves when interacting with the public.
- Regular cleaning of surfaces including wipe-downs and disinfecting fogging will continue in both the front lobby and the dispatch lobby.
- Consideration is also being given to adding credit/debit card payment options and seniors-only lobby hours.

The importance of maintaining our service to those that need it most is crucial – especially as options are reduced for everyone in emergencies like a pandemic. Through these cleaning measures, SMTD will do our part to slow the spread in 2020, and to slow the spread in future flu seasons as well. Our employees and our passengers are too important to do anything less!

## **Health Checks & Wellness**

As operators report for work, they will enter through or by an automatic temperature reader, which SMTD is investigating and planning to install as soon as possible. As always, dispatchers and road supervisors will continue to observe operators for any signs of COVID-19 symptoms. Operators will also continue to be asked to self-report any onset of symptoms and contact their health care provider if they are not feeling well. Should Sangamon County experience a spike, SMTD will consider further actions such as more frequent temperature checks and testing as necessary in accordance with the guidance of local, state, and federal guidelines.

In addition to protecting against the spread of COVID-19, SMTD will work to increase wellness programming offered to employees to begin to address some of the medical issues that put many at higher risk for more severe reactions to COVID-19 – Diabetes, Heart Disease, Respiratory

Disease. This effort goes beyond the response to this pandemic and would assist employees long-term with their health and wellness overall.

## **Operator and Passenger Safety**

As more operators return to driving, SMTD will continue to provide appropriate PPE. Operators are provided with masks, gloves, and wipes to maintain their driving area. Paratransit and fixed route operators having to strap in passengers in wheelchairs in the regular course of their day may be provided eye protection as well, depending on availability. SMTD is also considering adding plexiglass-type doors to driver compartments in paratransit and mainline buses to provide a physical barrier between operators and the public.

Operators are asked to self-report any COVID-19 symptoms or general feeling of illness, and SMTD will continue to follow the appropriate federal laws regarding leave for COVID-19-related reasons. In the instance of a passenger revealed to be positive for COVID-19 or displaying symptoms, SMTD will continue the policy of stopping the bus, removing the sick passenger, moving all other passengers to a new bus, and disinfecting the initial bus in place.

Passengers and operators will continue to be required to wear a face-covering for the foreseeable future. Passengers with face-coverings will be reminded to regularly clean them, and some will be made available for passengers who have not already received one from SMTD and need one to ride. SMTD has a limited supply, and we hope passengers will clean and re-use their masks whenever possible.

Passengers will continue to be asked to sit with space between other passengers wherever possible, and SMTD will work to alleviate crowding where personnel and vehicles allow.

### Restore Service Plan Phases for Operator and Passenger Safety:

Phase I – Face-covering required; No fare needed and rear-boarding required – both may be ended before Phase II, depending on COVID-19 positive testing rates and government restrictions being relaxed.\*

Phase II – Face-covering required – may eventually be only recommended depending on COVID-19 positive testing rates and government restrictions being relaxed.\*

*\*SMTD anticipates continued concern regarding COVID-19 throughout the summer and fall. Operating a service where social distancing is often not possible, SMTD passengers may be asked to wear a face-covering to ride for a longer period of time after other venues or local and state authorities allow the general public to discontinue their use. The safety of our operators and passengers are our primary concern, and SMTD wants to avoid any outbreaks among our valued employees and passengers.*

SMTD's lobby will likely open before Phase I of the Restore Service Plan is implemented. However, new restrictions will be in place (see "Cleaning" previously).

## Communications

As with any change in schedules, SMTD will communicate with the public well in advance of any service changes. However, following the restrictions from this COVID-19 emergency, SMTD will further communicate safety and cleaning measures in place to protect our operators and passengers. SMTD understands the concerns the public has about utilizing transit during and following a pandemic, and we will clearly communicate our work to alleviate those concerns.

On-board technology will be utilized wherever possible to provide reminders that face-coverings are required to ride and any other important, relevant messages SMTD deems appropriate.

Fliers will continue to be posted on buses and at transfer centers as necessary, and social media and local media will be utilized to further disseminate relevant information throughout the summer and fall.

Website: [www.SMTD.org](http://www.SMTD.org)  
Facebook: Sangamon Mass Transit District  
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